

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 145 734 A

(43) Application published 3 Apr 1985

(21) Application No 8419688	(51) INT CL ⁴ C22C 38/50
(22) Date of filing 2 Aug 1984	(52) Domestic classification C7A 744 781 783 A249 A255 A257 A259 A25Y A260 A28X A28Y A30Y A311 A313 A316 A319 A320 A339 A349 A35Y A360 A36Y A379 A37Y A381 A383 A385 A38X A409 A439 A459 A48Y A499 A501 A503 A505 A507 A509 A50X A529 A53Y A543 A545 A547 A549 A55Y A562 A565 A568 A571 A579 A57Y A584 A587 A589 A58Y A591 A593 A595 A599 A59X A605 A607 A609 A60Y A615 A617 A619 A61X A61Y A62X A671 A673 A675 A677 A679 A67X A681 A683 A685 A687 A689 A68X A693 A695 A697 A699 A69X A70X U1S 2011 3042 C7A
(30) Priority data (31) 58/143587 (32) 5 Aug 1983 (33) JP	(56) Documents cited GB 1577783 GB 1018674 GB 1551029 GB 0669131 GB 1379608
(71) Applicant Nisshin Steel Company Ltd. (Japan), 4-1 Marunouchi 3-chome, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan	(58) Field of search C7A
(72) Inventors Takeshi Utsunomiya, Kazuo Hoshino, Sadao Hirotsu	
(74) Agent and/or Address for Service Frank B. Dehn & Co., Imperial House, 15-19 Kingsway, London WC2B 6UZ	

(54) Martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel

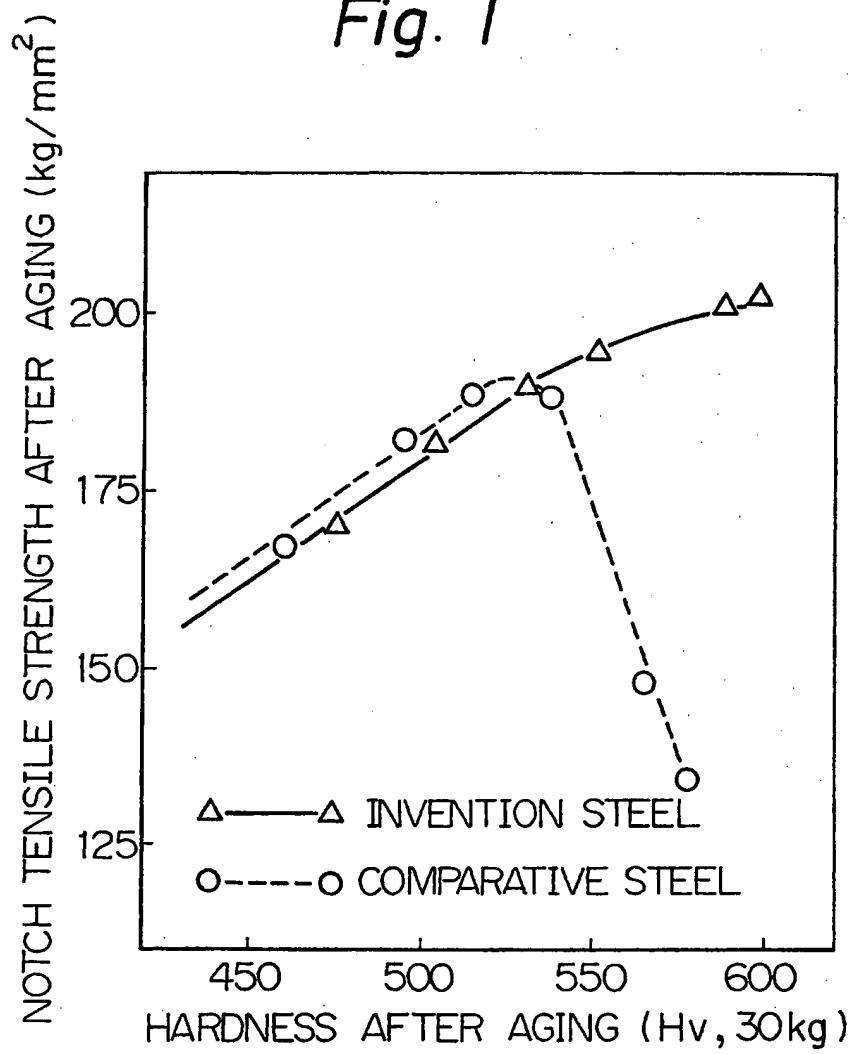
(57) A martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel essentially consisting of, in weight percent, not more than 0.08% C, 0.5 - 4.0% Si, not more than 4.0% Mn, 5.0 - 9.0% Ni, 10.0 - 17.0% Cr, more than 0.3% and up to 2.5% Mo, 0.15 - 1.0% Ti, not more than 1.0% Al and not more than 0.03% N and the balance being Fe, and inevitable incidental impurities, which may contain 0.3 - 2.5% Cu is disclosed. This steel has low hardness before aging and exhibits high strength and good toughness after aging.

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Fig. 1



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Fig. 2

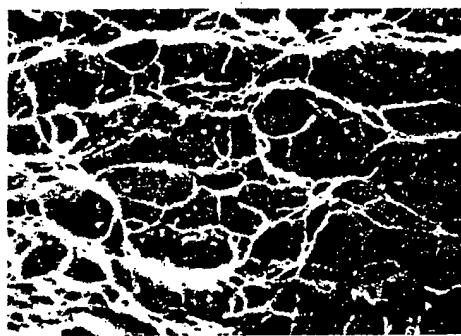
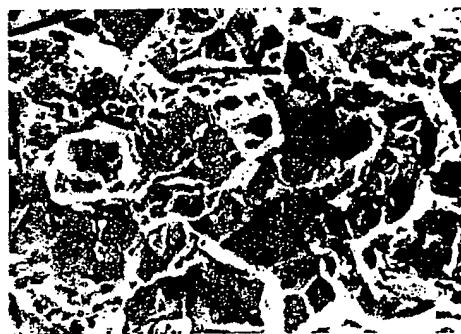


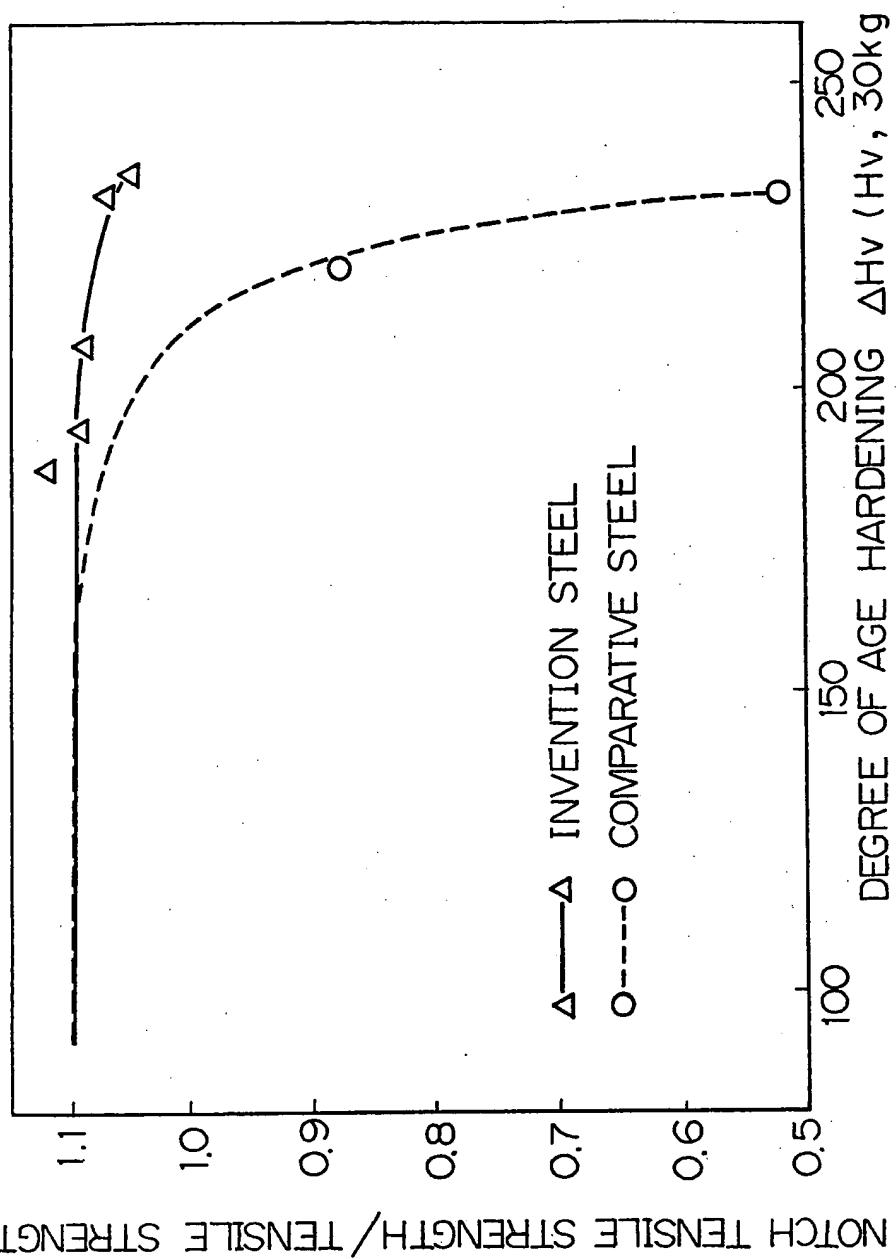
Fig. 3



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Fig. 4



SPECIFICATION

Martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel

5 **Technical field of the invention**

This invention relates to martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel which has low hardness before aging and exhibits high strength and good toughness after aging.

10 **Background of the invention**

When springs are manufactured of a high strength stainless steel, punching and forming are involved. Therefore, it is desired that the material is of low hardness before the aging treatment and is of high hardness after the aging treatment.

15 However, work-hardenable stainless steels represented by AISI 301 steel and precipitation-hardenable stainless steels represented by 17-7 PH steel, which have been conventionally used for manufacturing springs, must be heavily cold-worked in order to enhance hardness after aging. Accordingly, hardness in the cold-worked state before aging is inevitably high. That is, they are defective in that hardness before aging and hardness after aging cannot be separately controlled. These steels are also defective in that difficulties accompany the production thereof and yet adequate hardness after aging cannot be achieved.

Under the circumstances, we previously developed a stainless steel having the composition indicated 20 below which exhibits martensitic structure in the solution-treated state or the lightly worked state and is improved with respect to the above-mentioned defect. This invention is disclosed in Japanese Patent Application No. 34138/80 (Laid-Open Patent Publication No. 130459/81) under the title "Precipitation-Hardenable Stainless Steel for Springs".

25 The steel contains, in weight percent, more than 0.03% and not more than 0.08% C, not more than 0.03% N, 0.3 - 2.5% Si, not more than 4.0% Mn, 5.0 - 9.0% Ni, 12.0 - 17.0% Cr, 0.1 - 2.5% Cu, 0.2 - 1.0% Ti and not more than 1.0% Aℓ, the balance being Fe and inevitable incidental impurities, wherein the amounts of C, Ti, Mn, Ni, Cr, Cu and Aℓ are adjusted so that the value of A' defined as

$$A' = 17 \times (C\% / Ti\%) + 0.70 \times (Mn\%) + 1 \times (Ni\%) + 0.60 \times (Cr\%) + 0.76 \times (Cu\%) - 0.63 \times (A\%) + 20.871$$

30 is less than 42.0, and the amounts of Mn, Ni, Cu, Cr, Ti, Aℓ and Si are adjusted so that the value of Cr-equivalent/Ni-equivalent defined as

$$Cr\text{ eq.} = \frac{1 \times (Cr\%) + 3.5 \times (Ti\% + A\%) + 1.5 \times (Si\%)}{Ni\text{ eq.} = 1 \times (Ni\%) + 0.3 \times (Cu\%) + 0.65 \times (Mn\%)}$$

35 40 is not more than 2.7, and that the value of ΔHv defined as

$$\Delta Hv = 205 \times [Ti\% - 3 \times (C\% + N\%)] + 205 \times (A\% - 2 \times (N\%)) + 57.5 \times (Si\%) + 20.5 \times (Cu\%) + 20$$

45 45 is in the range of 120 - 210, and the steel exhibits substantially martensitic structure in the solution-treated state or in the not-more-than 50% cold-worked state.

This previously developed steel is excellent in punching and forming workability and it exhibits satisfactory properties as a spring material when ΔHv (the difference in hardnesses before and after aging) is adjusted to around 200. This steel can be easily produced since heavy cold working is not required.

50 50 In comparison with the maraging steels represented by 18Ni maraging steel, however, this steel is slightly inferior in toughness when used for springs or for constructions in the domain of the high strength steel (around 190 kg/mm² in notch tensile strength).

We studied for improving toughness of this previously developed steel and we have found that toughness of the steel can be retained at high strength by addition of Mo. That is, we have found that toughness of the 55 material can be well retained by addition of Mo even if ΔHv (degrée of aging), which was restricted to not more than 210 in consideration of toughness in the previously developed steel, is raised to more than 210. Also we have found that enhancement of strength can be attained by addition of Mo without depending upon the precipitation hardening effect of Cu, except when Cu is necessary for improvement of corrosion resistance against the sulfurous atmosphere.

60 60 **Disclosure of the invention**

This invention provides a precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness essentially consisting of, in weight percent, not more than 0.08% C, 0.5 - 4.0% Si, not more than 4.0% Mn, 5.0 - 9.0% Ni, 10.0 - 17.0% Cr, more than 0.3% and not more than 2.5% Mo, 0.15 - 1.0% Ti, not more than 1.0% Aℓ, not more

than 0.03% N, and the balance being Fe and inevitable incidental impurities, and a steel which contains 0.3 - 2.5% Cu in addition to the above described ingredients.

In preferred embodiments, the steel contains not more than 0.06% C, 1.0 - 3.5% Si, not more than 1.0% Mn, 6.0 - 8.0% Ni, 11.0 - 15.0% Cr, 0.4 - 2.0% Mo, 0.2 - 0.8% Ti, not more than 0.5% Al and not more than 0.025% N.

5 In more preferred embodiments, the steel contains not more than 0.05% C, 1.0 - 2.5% Si, not more than 0.5% Mn, 6.0 - 7.5% Ni, 12.0 - 14.5% Cr, 0.5 - 1.5% Mo, 0.2 - 0.6% Ti, not more than 0.1% Al and not more than 0.020% N.

A preferred Cu content is 0.3 - 2.00%, and a more preferred Cu content is 0.3 - 1.5% Cu.

The reasons for defining the composition as above are as follows:

10 (1) C

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In the previously developed steel, the C content was defined as more than 0.03% and not more than 0.08%. In the present invention, it is simply defined as not more than 0.08%. In the previously developed invention, 15 the toughness after the age hardening depended on the degree of age-hardening ΔH_v , and more than 0.03% C was required to secure high hardness before aging in order to obtain high strength after aging. But in the present invention, it is not longer required owing to the addition of Mo. Good toughness can be retained after aging in the ΔH_v range of not less than 210, in which toughness is deteriorated in the previously developed steel. The upper limit of the C content is 0.08% in the same way as the previously developed steel, 20 since in the range in excess of 0.08% C, the quenched martensitic phase of the matrix becomes hard and a plenty amount of Ti is required to fix C, which is uneconomical.

20

(2) Si

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25 As well as in the case of the previously developed steel, the steel is hardened by fine precipitation of an intermetallic compound consisting of Ni, Ti and Si. With the Si content of less than 0.5%, the effect thereof is slight. If Si is contained in an amount in excess of about 4.0%, there is no significant effect in comparison with addition of 4.0%, and it promotes formation of δ -ferrite. Therefore, the Si content is defined as 0.5 - 4.0%.

30 (3) Mn

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Mn contributes to suppression of formation of δ -ferrite. However, if Mn is added in a large amount, austenite is retained in a large amount. As a compromise, the Mn content is defined as not more than 4.0%. 35 Incidentally, Mn inhibits formation of δ -ferrite like-Ni, and therefore, Mn can replace a portion of Ni.

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(4) Ni

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Ni promotes precipitation hardening and inhibits formation of δ -ferrite. However, addition of a large amount thereof increases the amount of the retained austenite. In the case of the present invention, at least 5.0% of Ni is necessary for securing precipitation hardening, but it must not be in excess of about 9.0% in order to maintain the amount of the retained austenite low.

(5) Cr

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45 At least about 10.0% Cr is generally required to obtain corrosion resistance. But addition of a large amount of Cr increases the amount of δ -ferrite and retained austenite and therefore the upper limit is defined as 17.0%.

50 (6) Mo

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Mo is added in order to improve toughness, more than 0.3% Mo is required therefor. However, addition of more than 2.5% does not exhibit corresponding effect in comparison with addition of 2.5%, and raises steel price. Also addition of Mo in excess of 2.5% increases formation of δ -ferrite. Thus the upper limit is defined 55 as 2.5%.

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(7) Ti

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Ti is added in order to cause precipitation hardening. The effect thereof is not sufficient with the addition of less than 0.15% Ti, while addition of more than about 1.0% Ti makes the steel hard and brittle. Thus the Ti content is defined 0.15 - 1.0%.

(8) Al

Like Ti, Al is added to induce precipitation hardening. Addition in excess of about 1.0% decreases toughness, and thus the upper limit is defined as 1.0%. Also, Al can replace a portion of Ti.

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5

(9) N

N has strong affinity to Ti and Al, which cause precipitation hardening, and thus impairs the effect of addition of Ti and Al. Also high content of N causes formation of large inclusions of TiN and decreases 10 toughness. Thus lower content of N is preferred and it is limited to not more than 0.03%.

(10) Cu

In the case of the present invention, considerable strength can be secured even if precipitation effect of Cu 15 is not depended upon. In sulfur dioxide type corrosive environments, however, sufficient corrosion resistance is not obtained by Cr and thus Cu is added. Addition of at least 0.3% Cu is necessary in order to secure corrosion resistance against sulfur dioxide type gases. The upper limit is defined as 2.5%, since a larger amount of Cu causes red shortness and thus impairs hot workability and induces surface crackings.

The steel of this present invention which composed as described above substantially exhibits martensite 20 structure in the state cold-worked by up to 50%.

Brief explanation of the drawings
Figure 1 is a diagram which shows the relation

TABLE 1

Sample No.	C	Si	Mn	Ni	Cr	Cu	Mo	Ti	Al	% by weight)	
										N	N
Invention Steels	1	0.040	1.44	0.29	7.36	14.70	1.01	0.51	0.49	0.022	0.010
	2	0.010	3.13	0.33	7.01	12.33	0.08	1.03	0.21	0.025	0.014
	3	0.009	1.68	0.33	7.02	13.78	0.06	1.02	0.56	0.018	0.018
	4	0.009	1.60	0.34	6.50	14.85	2.03	0.57	0.39	0.030	0.014
	5	0.045	1.64	0.22	6.75	14.10	0.04	1.05	0.74	0.020	0.016
	6	0.037	0.55	0.32	7.10	14.31	0.06	2.11	0.81	0.022	0.015
Comparative Steels	7	0.035	1.50	0.32	7.10	14.70	0.55	-	0.70	0.024	0.012
	8	0.036	1.49	0.32	7.44	14.94	1.08	-	0.57	0.020	0.009

TABLE 2

	Sample No.	Hardness after aging (Hv = 30 kg)	Hardness increase through aging (ΔHv)	NTS after aging (kg/mm ²)	
10	Invention Steels	1	545	193	199
		2	554	186	208
		3	550	207	196
		4	547	222	201
		5	587	235	198
		6	542	203	195
		7	590	232	115
20	Comparative Steels	8	565	217	160

between hardness and notch tensile strength of an invention steel (Sample No. 3) and a comparative steel (Sample No. 8) after aging at 480°C for varied times. Figure 2 is a micrograph of a fracture surface of the above-mentioned invention steel sample which was subjected to the tensile test after aging at 480°C for 1 hour. Figure 3 is a micrograph of a fracture surface of the above-mentioned comparative steel sample tested under the same conditions. Figure 4 is a diagram showing the relation between degree of age hardening ΔH_v and the ratio of notch tensile strength to tensile strength of the invention steels and the comparative steels indicated in Table 1.

30 *Embodiments of the invention*
Now the invention is explained by way of working examples.

The chemical compositions of the tested steels are listed in Table 1. Samples No. 1 - 6 are steels of this invention and Samples No. 7 and 8 are comparative steels which do not contain Mo which characterizes the present invention, and are adjusted so that ΔH_v is greater than 210, which was the upper limit in the previously developed steel, and the steel exhibits high strength after aging.

In Table 2 are shown hardness, increase in hardness through aging and notch tensile strength (NTS) of steels listed in Table 1 which were solution-treated, cold-rolled to 1.0 mm thickness and aged at 480°C for 1 hour.

40 It is apparent from Table 2 that the steels of this invention and the comparative steels are similar in hardness after aging. However, the invention steels are far higher in notch tensile strength than the comparative steels. (Refer to Sample No. 5 and 7 for instance)

Figure 1 shows the relation between hardness and notch tensile strength of Sample No. 3 (invention steel) and Sample No. 8 (Comparative steel) which have almost the same composition except for Mo. In the case of 45 the steel of this invention, as hardness increases, notch tensile strength also increases, that is, toughness is well retained at high hardness. In contrast, in the comparative steel, notch tensile strength increases until hardness reaches the level of around 520 Hv, but steeply drops at the higher hardness, that is, the steel is embrittled.

50 Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively show the fracture surface of the invention steel and the comparative steel used for the notch tensile test as shown in Figure 1. The fracture surface of the invention steel exhibits dimples but that of the comparative steel exhibits intergranular fractures and cleavage fractures. These fracture surfaces also suggest that the former steel has good ductility and the latter steel is brittle. It is considered that Mo contributes to strengthening grain boundaries.

55 Figure 4 is a diagram wherein the degree of age hardening ΔH_v and the ratio of notch tensile strength to tensile strength (NTS/TS) of the invention steels No. 1 - 6 and comparative steels No. 7 and 8 are plotted. In the case of the previously developed steel, the value of NTS/TS drops to less than 1.0 at Hv of 210 and higher. In contrast, in the invention steel, high of NTS/TS ratio is well retained at higher than 1.0 even at ΔH_v of 240 or higher.

60 *Industrial utilization of the invention*
As has been described above, the steel of the present invention is of low hardness and has excellent forming and punching workability before aging and that it has excellent toughness even when the steel is hardened by aging. The steel is used as a material not only for springs for which characteristics such as excellent spring limit value, fatigue rupture limit value, etc. are required, but also for thick plates of which 65 high level toughness is required.

CLAIMS

1. A martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness essentially consisting of, in weight percent, not more than 0.08% C, 0.5 - 4.0% Si, not more than 4.0% Mn, 5.0 - 9.0% Ni, 10.0 - 17.0% Cr, more than 0.3% and up to 2.5% Mo, 0.15 - 1.0% Ti, not more than 1.0% Al and not more than 0.03% N, and Fe and inevitable incidental impurities. 5

2. The martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness as claimed in Claim 1, which contains, in weight percent, not more than 0.06% C, 1.0 - 3.5% Si, not more than 1.0% Mn, 6.0 - 8.0% Ni, 11.0 - 15.0% Cr, 0.4 - 2.0% Mo, 0.2 - 0.8% Ti, not more than 0.5% Al and not more than 0.025% N. 10

3. The martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness claimed in Claim 2, which contains, in weight percent, not more than 0.045% Ni, 12.0 - 14.5% Cr, 0.5 - 1.5% Mo, 0.2 - 0.6% Ti, not more than 0.1% Al and not more than 0.020% N. 10

4. A martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness essentially consisting of, in weight percent, not more than 0.08% C, 0.5 - 4.0% Si, not more than 4.0% Mn, 5.0 - 9.0% Ni, 10.0 - 17.0% Cr, 0.3 - 2.5% Cu, more than 0.3% and up to 2.5% Mo, 0.15 - 1.0% Ti, not more than 1.0% Al and not more than 0.03% N and Fe and inevitable incidental impurities. 15

5. The martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness as claimed in Claim 4, which contains, in weight percent, not more than 0.06% C, 1.0 - 3.5% Si, not more than 1.0% Mn, 6.0 - 8.0% Ni, 11.0 - 15.0% Cr, 0.3 - 2.00% Cu, 0.4 - 2.0% Mo, 0.2 - 0.8% Ti, not more than 0.5% Al and not more than 0.025% N. 20

6. The martensitic precipitation-hardenable stainless steel having excellent toughness as claimed in Claim 5, which contains, in weight percent, not more than 0.5% C, 1.0 - 2.5% Si, not more than 0.5% Mn, 6.0 - 7.5% Ni, 12.0 - 14.5% Cr, 0.3 - 1.5% Cu, 0.5 - 1.5% Mo, 0.20 - 0.6% Ti, not more than 0.1% Al and not more than 0.020% N. 20

7. A steel as claimed in any preceding claim, having a composition substantially as described herein for any of Samples 1-6. 25

8. A steel as claimed in any preceding claim when hardened.